BACKGROUND

The Government of Bihar (GoB) is committed to providing accessible, affordable, accountable and quality health care services to every citizen, with special focus on women and children living in the remotest rural areas.

Towards this objective, the state has put in great efforts to recruit Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs), and establish a network of community link health workers - ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist). However, beside availability of health workers, the challenge is that many newly trained nurses and midwives lack critical skills to provide quality services to women and children at the facility and community level. The State realizes that for addressing these gaps and ensuring quality nursing and midwifery education and training, the existing ANM Training Centres (ANMTCs) and General Nursing and Midwifery (GNM) Schools need to be strengthened.

Jhpiego, an international nonprofit health organization affiliated with Johns Hopkins University, has technical expertise in reproductive health, maternal and child health, family planning and pre-service education for nursing and midwifery cadre. Since early 2010, Jhpiego has been working closely with Indian Nursing Council (INC) for strengthening the pre-service education for nurses and midwives at the national and state level.

STRATEGIC APPROACH

With support from the Norway India Partnership Initiative (NIPI), Jhpiego is providing technical assistance to the GoB in its efforts towards improving the quality of pre-service education (PSE) for nursing and midwifery cadre in the state. At present all 21 ANMTCs and 6 GNM schools in the state are being strengthened through this support.

The goal of this program is to improve the quality of pre-service education (PSE) for nursing and midwifery cadre in Bihar, thereby contributing to strengthening the delivery of high impact maternal, newborn, child health and family planning interventions at the facility and community level.
Establish a nodal centre of excellence for nursing and midwifery PSE in Bihar which will act as a state resource centre and will provide support towards strengthening the capacity of GNM schools and ANMTCs.

Improve the educational standards and processes in GNM schools and AMNTCs by strengthening the education infrastructure of these schools. Strengthen the teaching skills of the faculty of the GNM Schools and ANMTCs by training the faculty in pedagogic courses, while concurrently strengthening the faculty’s managerial and supervisory capacity in order to improve the overall management of the educational processes in these schools.

Strengthen the clinical skills development of GNM and ANM graduates by strengthening the clinical practice sites of the GNM Schools and ANMTCs and simultaneously updating faculty knowledge, and standardizing their clinical skills in MNCH interventions.

The program uses Jhpiego’s Standards-Based Management and Recognition (SBM-R®) Approach to performance and quality improvement as an over arching mechanism for implementing INC approved educational and clinical standards across the ANM and GNM Schools in Bihar.

**Main Objectives of the Program**

**Establishment of a State level Technical Advisory Group on Pre-Service Nursing and Midwifery Education**

A Technical Advisory Group (TAG) under the Chairmanship of Director, Indira Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences (IGIMS) was established, with NIPI UNOPS as a member. The first meeting of TAG was organized at Bihar State Health Society, Patna on 24th August 2011.

**Nomination of a Nodal Officer from the State**

Following several advocacy efforts with state government officials, GoB has nominated a Nodal Officer, who is exclusively working toward strengthening nursing education in Bihar. The role of the nodal officer would be to facilitate activities with all stakeholders resulting in effective implementation of the INC approved standards in all the nursing schools resulting in skilled providers passing out from these institutions.

**Establishing a State Nodal Centre of Excellence for Nursing Midwifery Education**

In alignment with the INC’s national initiative, a state nodal center of excellence is being established at the College of Nursing IGIMS, Patna. It is envisioned that this nodal center will subsequently provide mentoring and support to all the ANMTCs and GNM Schools of the State. After identifying the areas for improvement through the baseline assessment at the State Nodal Centre at IGIMS, Patna, several infrastructural and human resource strengthening activities have been executed at the institution.

Shri Sanjay Kumar, Secretary Health cum Executive Director, State Health Society Bihar underscored the government’s commitment to this program by saying, “Nursing remains a weakness in the State of Bihar. So, we are in the process of strengthening and upgrading the existing ANM schools. Jhpiego is helping us to set up and also providing technical support to roll out the Nursing College at IGIMS. Technical support is what the state of Bihar requires. and this is where we appreciate the help of the kind of services that Jhpiego and NIPI are providing us and we look forward to their continuing support.”
Towards the clinical practices at the attached hospitals of the nursing schools, a three day “Clinical Skills Standardization” training is organized. In the first phase, six CSS trainings were conducted at six Medical College Hospitals, which are also the clinical sites of college of Nursing, IGIMS and 6 GNM schools. Staff nurses from the labor room, ANC and PNC wards and Sick Newborn Care Units of these hospitals and four district hospitals attached with the ANMTCs participated in these trainings. Clinical staff from all these hospitals was oriented on the need for strengthening nursing and midwifery pre-service education in the state and their role in it.

**Improving Educational and Clinical Standards and Processes at the GNM and ANM Schools**

In order to improve the quality of nursing education and achieve the INC approved standards at the nursing institutions, the faculty members of GNM / ANM schools and the clinical staff of their respective clinical sites are being provided essential knowledge, skills and attitude through the SBM-R process. Towards this objective, a three day workshop was conducted for the 6 GNM and 21 ANM schools. Using the INC approved educational and clinical standards, baseline assessments were conducted, gaps identified and individual action plans were drawn by the respective teams at all the ANMTCs and GNM Schools. The baseline assessments showed that the educational processes and clinical practices at the ANMTCs and GNM Schools were of sub-optimal quality. Jhpiego is working with these ANM and GNM schools, and their respective clinical sites to implement educational and clinical standards towards bringing about a holistic improvement in the quality of education at these institutions.

**Capacity Building of Faculty**

With the intention of delivering quality, competency-based clinical education to nursing students, capacity building of the faculty members is done by Jhpiego through a six weeks training course. Till now, 18 faculty members have been trained at National Nodal centre at NRS College of Nursing at Kolkata. Simultaneously, faculty members from IGIMS, Patna were trained in a 10-day Training of Trainers (ToT) course to enable them to act as master trainers for the subsequent trainings of ANM and GNM faculty at the State level.

“We ourselves, attended classes in this 6 weeks training that started from 8.30 am and went on till 6pm, but we still did not feel bored or tired at any time. The techniques used in teaching us were so varied that we felt totally involved.”
Asha Bharti, sister tutor at College of Nursing, IGIMS, Patna, after attending the 6 weeks training in Kolkata

“We had no idea that we will be introduced to so many different methods of teaching. We could not envision so much how to make sessions interesting and interactive etc. It’s been a very nice experience.”
Archana Sinha, sister tutor at College of Nursing, IGIMS, Patna, after attending the 6 weeks training in Kolkata
Bihar has recently approved the Program Implementation Plan including Pre Service Education budget for about INR 80 crores (USD 16 million) for strengthening of the infrastructure, including training infrastructure and renovations to the existing schools, for the existing GNM Schools and ANMTCs.

Given the poor quality of education at the institutions as observed in the baseline assessments, the task at hand is quite challenging. However, there is tremendous enthusiasm among the nursing faculty, officials from Bihar government and, with support from NIPI, one can already see tangible results. The task of achieving a strengthened and optimally functional nursing-midwifery education system that meets the demands of the state’s health system and the requirements of the state’s growing population is mammoth and will take concerted efforts. Jhpiego has been working closely with the state government, Indian Nursing Council and other stakeholders to achieve the desired outcomes for the above. Work is on to completely operationalize the state nodal center at IGIMS. Clinical Skills Standardization training is being rolled out to the clinical sites of all the GNM and ANM schools. Efforts are also on to strengthen the training infrastructure at the institutions and to develop the capacity of the remaining faculty through the six week training curriculum. NIPI UNOPS working with Jhpiego will continue in its advocacy efforts to bring about policy level changes in the nursing cadre.